



**Mayor Mitchell J. Landrieu
Crime Action Summit Address**

S.O.S. NOLA: Saving Our Sons

**UNO Lakefront Arena
New Orleans, Louisiana**

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*****Prepared Remarks*****

EMBARGOED UNTIL DELIVERY

Thank you all for coming.

I am overwhelmed and inspired by the turnout and the passion that all of you have brought here today.

When you boil this down to its essence, we are standing on the narrow edge of time. And we have to make a decision about whether or not we are going to fall off of it, or whether we are going to pull back from the abyss and lay a foundation for the future, for our sons and our daughters.

That is really what we are here for. We are here to discuss what happens when we are gone, what this city will look like when our children are grown.

I want to tell you a few stories that will crystallize what this period in our city's history is about.

In 1994, on Mother's Day, a young nine-year old boy named James Darby and his mama and their family decided they wanted to have a picnic. They went to A.L. Davis Park.

For those of you who live in the 13th Ward around me, it's on the corner of Washington and Simon Bolivar. So, he and his mother and his sisters went to the park. There were a lot of other families there and after sitting for a while, they decided to play a pickup football game. As they played, one player got knocked down, and when he got up, he said something to James. The other boy's sister got upset and a little scuffle broke out.

During the scuffle the sister took an elbow to the eye and she left the park crying. When she got home, she told her older brother Joseph and he got really upset. He had been drinking all day and someone had disrespected his sister. On top of that, unbeknownst to anyone else, she was pregnant. Joseph's father had left years ago and Joseph, who was only nineteen, was the man of the house. He had to avenge his family's honor.

So he and his little brother, Michael, got back in the car and they went back to AL Davis Park. By this time, James and his mother and all the other families were heading home.

Joseph and Michael pulled up next to the group and Joseph stuck a sawed off shotgun out of the car window. Joseph had never fired a gun before, but on that day, he fired a shot into the crowd which hit James Darby in the head.

James died. He was nine years old.

Six days before that, the White House received a letter addressed to President Clinton. The letter read: "I am afraid for my life. I'm afraid that something is going to happen to me."

It was signed by James Darby.

And you know what, something did happen. And this is one of the incredible and great tragedies of America: people on the street being killed and people killing.

The pain and the agony of losing a child, for both the family of the victim and the family of the perpetrator, because you see both of these kids, James and Joseph, are gone.

One taken from us too soon. The other is 36 years old today and has served 17 years in Angola. He will be there for the rest of his life.

The pain and the agony - both of those mothers at once falling into a deep downward spiral of despair - is something that has plagued the city of New Orleans and America for too long.

Common pain, common agony, and common suffering that only a mother can feel in the depths of her soul – when a parent lives to see the death of a child.

What should be rare is all too common. And it is something that we have become accustomed to as if it is natural and normal, and it is something that, if we are to survive, we must change.

On the same streets, in the same neighborhood, sixteen years after James Darby's death, our children continue to be taken from us.

Late last September, after a parade, Delaaronia Galmon was saying goodbye to her friends while her family— including her two year old son Jeremy, her 11 month old daughter Janiya, and her mother – waited nearby in the family car.

While waiting, a Silver Chevy Impala pulled up. Two young boys inside of the Impala began raining shots out of the car windows aiming for a group of young men who were standing near the Galmon's car.

As bullets zipped through the air, the children's grandmother instinctively reached over and covered her babies. But Jeremy, out of curiosity, lifted his head to see what was going on outside. And that was the last thing he would do.

You see Jeremy was too young, too innocent to know that the crack of gunfire meant danger was approaching.

So as he looked, a bullet struck him in the side of the head.

In panic, his uncle raced him to a nearby hospital, but it was too late. Jeremy died September 26, 2010. He was two.

Though the crossfire of bullets was not intended for Jeremy, the consequence was the same – the murder of another child, taken too early.

Through the reckless action of young people seeking revenge, a two-year old lost his life and a family was torn apart. History was changed.

These acts of violence that took James and Jeremy from us are not isolated incidents.

In fact, since 1994, in your City, on the streets of the United States of America, over four thousand people have lost their lives – four thousand people – each one a brother or a sister, a mother or a father, a son or a daughter – each murder spurring more hate and more revenge creating an unholy and vicious cycle of violence that has poisoned and drowned our City for too long.

IT MUST STOP.

It has to stop.

And of the four thousand people murdered in our City over the past sixteen years—one hundred and seventy five of them in 2010 alone—the majority of the victims were young African American men killed at the hands of other young African American men.

We asked the Department of Justice to help us tackle this problem. They did some research and here is what we know:

In almost 80% of the known cases, the victim and the offender knew each other.

And these murders are highly concentrated geographically in the city.

Both victims and perpetrators are mostly young, mostly unemployed mostly African-American males with criminal records.

Our homicides are not as drug or gang-related as in other cities.

And ordinary disputes that used to be solved with a fist fight can escalate into homicides.

In February this year, 2011, a 17-year-old was shot to death in the 7th Ward. The same weekend, a 19-year-old was gunned down by a man with an assault rifle. Earlier that month a 15-year-old was killed in the East. Another 15-year-old was shot dead in Holy Cross in January. And last September, someone murdered a 16-year-old.

All teenagers. All classmates at John McDonogh High School.

From September of last year to February of this year, a student attending John McDonogh was more likely to be killed than a soldier in Afghanistan.

That's right—a higher likelihood of being murdered on the streets of New Orleans than an American soldier being killed in Afghanistan.

Quite frankly, right now on our streets there is a war being waged for the heart and soul of New Orleans. And we are leaving our brothers and sisters behind.

New Orleans, this is the most difficult and important challenge that we will face. All of our progress, all of our hard work, our past and our future lie in our ability to change the culture of violence and death in our City and to one of peace and prosperity, joy and possibility.

But it seems we have become numb to the frequency of these tragedies.

We cannot allow them to continue and we cannot simply consider them a part of our daily lives and our culture – like taking the streetcar, eating a roast beef sandwich, watching a parade, or hanging out at a second line – because every life has value; every murder kills a piece of us all.

These murders bring pain and suffering, fear and despair, and they threaten our freedom because we cannot be free if we live in fear. These murders have a cost—both in dollars and in human capital.

We are losing the next Trombone Shorty or Ellis Marsalis. The next generation of scientists, firefighters, CEOs, or elected officials.

And in this battle—for our sons, for our future—we must come together once again just as we did during Katrina and the BP Oil Spill because this situation is just as important and just as critical for our City's survival and for our future.

New Orleans, this is about changing the culture of death and violence that has held us back for generations. This is about coming together to triumph over yet another challenge. This is about moving forward – moving past the vestiges of poverty and racism and marching into the light of freedom and redemption. This is about creating a pathway to prosperity not a pathway to prison.

It's about courage. It's about hope. And really, it's about liberty.

And yes it's hard. I'm no fool. This is going to take a cultural shift in the way we value life, in the way we view each other—not as enemies or as black or white, but as neighbors, and family.

You see - here is the thing about culture. People get afraid to change it because they think all culture is equal. It's not. The culture of violence is not good. The culture of disrespect is not good. But a culture of excellence is good and where we want to go. We want a culture of diversity. We want a culture where every kid has a chance to learn. We want a culture of safety.

We can keep the things about our culture that make us rich – like our music, our gumbo, and our year-round festivals– and we can discard those things that hold us back and weaken us. It is all our choice.

But it is going to require a delicate touch. It's going to require a great amount of insight. And ultimately it's going to require courage and freedom. And only the people in this room – only you who are here and in the community can provide that.

This won't be easy. But we must be willing to do what is difficult for the sake of doing what is right. And it has to be all of us in together.

One team. One fight. One voice. One city.

Immediately after Katrina hit and the waters rose, we witnessed the future of New Orleans. I witnessed people helping each other without regard to race, creed or color or geography.

It didn't matter whether you lived in the 14th Ward or the 9th Ward. It didn't matter whether you lived in Gert Town or Pigeon Town or Back of Town or New Orleans East or the Westbank. It didn't matter because we were all in peril, we were all drowning. We had a common enemy. We had a common threat.

And you know what happened?

We didn't become small. We didn't become hateful. We became big. We became strong. We reached out to each other.

I saw old, white women walking down the street hand in hand with young black girls who had lost their momma and their daddy. In the afternoon dusk, I saw three young black men wheeling an old white man on a cafeteria cart. He was helpless, too frail to even walk down the street, but these strangers got him out of harm's way. In those people, in those moments, I saw the possibilities of what can happen when people come together.

In New Orleans, we are a place of family. That's who we are. That's what we do.

Well, wake up New Orleans. We may have risen out of the waters. But today, we still face an epidemic that threatens our existence as a people.

Now, I didn't ask you to come here today to listen to me talk. I do that enough. I didn't ask you to come here today to watch footage of another murdered New Orleanian—you can see that at the top of the 10 o'clock news nearly every night.

I asked you to come here today to join our army in the battle for the future of this city we love so much.

Murder is the most pressing issue facing our city. And we must rally as a community to solve this problem.

It won't happen with the police alone. It can't just be the criminal justice system in a room at City Hall or Tulane and Broad. In this battle, YOU are the most valuable asset we have.

I'm asking each of you to make a commitment – it can be large or small, it can be time, money or prayer. But we need everyone to have skin in the game.

And I wouldn't ask you to do something if we didn't also.

Here at City Hall, we've committed to investing in our kids. We doubled the budget for NORD and Job One and put 3,000 teens to work this summer because we know that the key is giving our kids the chance to pick up a book or a ball instead of a bullet and a gun.

And we just recently announced a new pilot program where neighborhood residents and ex-offenders will be employed to cut blighted properties, which are breeding grounds for crimes.

Now, we're moving to focus on violence interruption as well. For months, our Criminal Justice Commissioner James Carter, Chief Serpas, and Health Commissioner Dr. Karen DeSalvo have been working on a grant to match city funds to launch the Ceasefire initiative in New Orleans.

It's a bold, new approach that's working in Chicago.

First, we have to recognize that violence is a disease and that we have a public health crisis on our hands. So we have to interrupt the transmission of violent behavior.

The project will employ messengers – whether they are ex-offenders or individuals who know the life of the street, to reach members of the community who are most likely to shoot or be shot.

These folks will intervene when there is the potential for violence, mediating high-risk conflict situations and preventing retaliatory violence, which we know is the bulk of the murders in New Orleans.

The City in the past funded the beginnings of “Solutions not Shootings” in Central City along with Baptist Community Ministries and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

But today, I’m committing that we will throw everything we’ve got at changing the culture of death and violence on the streets.

And this is one of the most important investments we can make – so for the remainder of 2011, we are committing \$250,000 of seed money so that the Ceasefire program can grow in targeted neighborhoods in New Orleans.

We are also working with schools so conflict resolution can be taught right alongside math and English, because all too often problems on the streets start during school hours and our young people need the tools to defuse dangerous confrontations.

Right now, Circle of Courage teaches New Orleans’ high school students to be peacemakers and is already making a difference at schools like Carver and Reed, but we must do more to interrupt the violence.

The brilliance of Circle of Courage is that its approach is based on the lesson that every parent knows too well – teenagers listen more to their friends than to adults. So for our young people, often the most powerful messengers of nonviolence are not the police chief or teacher, mom or dad, but other young people, and we need their voices, their energies, and their buy-in if we are to win this fight.

We’re also working with the Sheriff and the Courts on re-entry programs. We’re issuing summonses for petty crimes instead of holding people in jail which allows officers to focus on the more serious offenses. We’re taking illegal guns off the streets. We’re reforming the NOPD with the Department of Justice so that we can once again trust our police force.

This is the model: prevention, intervention, interdiction, prosecution, rehabilitation, and re-entry.

It has to be comprehensive. It has to be collaborative, which is where you come in.

There are a number of things each resident of New Orleans can do to make our city safer and more prosperous.

So here are our marching orders.

First, you can take a role in your own neighborhood, reinvigorating neighborhood watch. Working with our NOPD community coordinating sergeants, we will rebuild neighborhood watch programs in every section of our city. And we will help train and build capacity in neighborhoods that need help organizing. Leading up to the October 11th Night Out Against Crime, we will host City-wide Neighborhood Watch training sessions at Gallier Hall for all of those who are ready to get to work.

Second, you can be a mentor or volunteer. There are more than 3 dozen organizations located in our Resource Action Center who need volunteers and mentors. Volunteer to coach a pee wee football team. Spend some time mentoring a kid after school so they know that someone cares and is willing to help them succeed.

Third, you can open your checkbook. These organizations that work so hard to provide services need money in the bank to run. And every cent counts. For \$3,000, the Youth Empowerment Project can help an out-of-school youth get a GED and move onto post-secondary and employment opportunities. An investment in Café Reconcile and Liberty's Kitchen can help train the next generation of New Orleans's chefs. You can donate to the NORD Foundation so kids can have more opportunities to play, to learn, and to earn.

Fourth, you, your employer or your business can provide job opportunities for our young people and ex-offenders. Now, we tripled the number of organizations offering summer jobs for our kids. But it's going to take more than 150 employers to turn our city around.

What can your company do?

This is going to take all of our collective efforts.

So sign up for our summer jobs program with JOB1. Give New Orleanians an opportunity to rebuild New Orleans.

Now, at the end of the summit today, we're going to pass a collection plate like at church. You've all been handed a white card. Fill it out. Make a commitment. Put it in the basket.

We will have an army of people committed to saving our sons and saving our city.

So here's the thing New Orleans. We're one people. One.

It's just one fight. We are one city. We must speak with one voice. We must go in one direction. We're going to be one New Orleans. But it's not going to come for free. It's not going to come by accident. It has to come with passion and commitment. It has to come with courage and conviction. It has to come with hard work.

And so New Orleans cannot be the city that care forgot. It in fact has to be a city with purpose. We have to resolve to turn the tide. It is our responsibility, mine and yours.

Dr. King once said: "Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be. This is the interrelated structure of reality."

So you see, this affects all of us. Fixing this problem is going to take all of us.

Enough is enough, New Orleans. Our sons are worth saving. Our city is worth saving.

So let's all pull together and get to work.

Thank you all very much and God bless you.